

FAIRY TALES OF KINDNESS & COURAGE



• VOLUME I •

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ALSO BY NATHANAEL WRIGHT

Unity: Restoring America through Timeless Principles

Poetic Curiosities of Rhapsody and Rhyme

Poetic Curiosities of Light, Love and Adventure

Poetic Curiosities of Reflection

Love Touches Time

Coming Soon: Seeking Charity



**FAIRY TALES
OF
KINDNESS & COURAGE**



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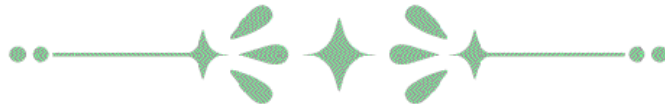
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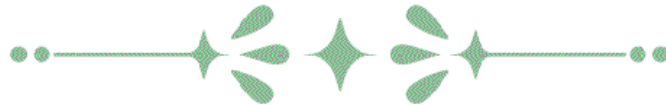


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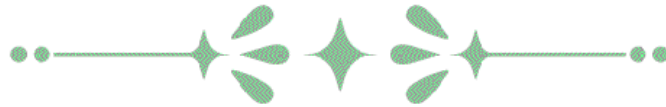
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Author's Note



The strength of fairy tales resides in the uplifting lessons they teach. They can be a beacon of hope in a world that tells us we can't trust in anything. They can remind us that in the grand scheme of things, good deeds are rewarded. And they can restore our faith in humanity, heaven, and the unselfish virtues that elevate humankind. In these ways fairy tales can sometimes be more real to us than what the world says are the cold hard facts of life. For the world isn't as dark and hopeless as it sometimes seems. Hope, kindness, forgiveness, and truth live on. After every night there's a gorgeous dawn!



The Mermaid & The Bear



There was once a little girl with light brown hair and a smile that was as bright and lovely as the dawning sun. Her name was Dandelion, but everyone called her Dandi. She loved to play outside in the yard, within the woods, and on the hill near the lake. Her mother would often worry and was always careful to watch that Dandi didn't go too close to the lake. Her mother would caution, "Now Dandi, be sure to stay away from the lake. I love you very much, and I wouldn't want you to drown."

Then her mother would add, "And don't go near the wizard's fence: he doesn't like anyone near his property." The old man that people called "the wizard" had lived at the top of the hill near the edge of the lake for quite a long time. He didn't like children. In fact, he did not like anybody, even himself. Every day he'd stay inside and work with his chemistry and magic books. Only occasionally would he leave his house to tend his vegetable garden and feed the goats that he kept in his fence. For that reason, he earned the title of a wizard by the town's folk.

For the most part, Dandi listened to her mother. But slowly, ever so slowly day after day, she'd wander up the hill, closer and closer to the old man's fence. Until one day she touched it. Nothing happened, so the next day she did it again. Eventually she chose to play and climb on the fence every day. Although it was a worn and ugly fence, the old man didn't like her crawling on it. He'd watch her from his window and scowl to himself, pacing back and forth angrily inside his home.

One day as Dandi was climbing on the fence, she felt a strange feeling come over her, and she fell forward to the other side. Suddenly she felt herself pushed and rolling down the hill towards the lake. She tried to stop herself,

but her feet wouldn't work right. She briefly saw what she thought was the old man at the top of the hill, holding an open book. But before she knew it, she landed in the cool, dark blue water of the lake. She struggled for air for a moment then quickly found that she could breathe underwater. Not only that, but her feet were now joined together as one big fin. Swishing her tail back and forth, she reached the surface of the lake and looked towards the old man's house.



She quickly sensed herself pushed again and then realized that she was being pulled by the strong currents of water through the outlet of the lake and down the river that led to the sea. As she slid through the slippery rocks of the river, miraculously she didn't receive any real harm. Sure, she got some bruises and some of her skin was red from being pulled by the current over river rocks, but she came to a rest just beyond the opening of the river's mouth in the sea. Everything had changed so fast that her mind was a blur. What happened? she thought to herself. One moment she was climbing on the

fence and through a series of what felt like rapid pushes, she found herself immersed in the sea with a mermaid fin. A mermaid fin! I have a mermaid fin! She cheered to herself.

Dandi's excitement bubbled over, and she quickly set to try it out. Swimming as fast as she could, she dived deep and then sprang from the water as high as she could. She did it again and again, spinning, and splashing down into the water. It was tiring, but the most fun she could possibly imagine herself having. She chased fish and even saw a Marlin with pretty streaks of silver and blue on its body. When next she came up to the surface, she gazed upon the most beautiful sunset. Gold and orange light mingled together on the surface of the water and the smell of fresh green salty seaweed in her hair seemed like a dream. Quiet little waves of water bounced off her small body, and she soon found herself alone.

How will I get home? She pondered to herself. She looked around and recognized that the steep rocks on the shore offered no easy path to get back where she had come. What will mother or papa think when they see that I'm a mermaid? She wondered. Across the entire length of the shore as far as Dandi could see, there was no sandy beach; only rocks, some large and smooth and others small and jagged. Even if she could get atop the tall rocks, how could she get home?

She had a mermaid tail and even the current of the river was too strong for her swim to get home. Hopelessly she swam around the shore, searching for an outlet, or any place, or way that might look like a path she could take. The shore, every which way, was nearly all covered by boulders or jagged rocks. She attempted to pull herself atop one large rock, but her small size, limited strength, and the slippery surface made it impossible. Finally, at about midnight, she gave up and crawled between two large rocks where she cried herself asleep in the surf.

Dawn woke Dandi to the familiar taste of sea salt. For a moment she wondered how she had landed between two rocks by the sea and did not wake up in her bed. Then she looked down at her tail and remembered. Again, she was sad, and questioned, What should I do? A short while later, she left the two rocks and began to scan the surface of the sea. Finding it rougher than the

night before she dove under the waves. Dandi was amazed at the wonderful sights she saw beneath. The sea floor was covered with colorful fish and other creatures busying about like people at a market in the center of a town. "Hello!" She cried out to many of them. Some responded and others didn't. For a while she asked for help, but none could offer anything that would allow her to return home.

Though she met many fascinating creatures like fish, the stinging anemone, and sea horses, she felt utterly alone. She deeply wanted to return home to be in the arms of her mother and father, since surely they'd still love her, even if she was a mermaid? Suddenly she saw a shadow from atop the water, a moment later nets followed. Fish and sea creatures scurried through the water every which way. None of the nets were near Dandi, though. All she thought was to ask for help: maybe the people in the boat would help her? Quickly she approached the boat and swam to the surface, lifting her head above the water. "Help me!" she blurted out, "I'm in trouble and lost! I need to find my way back to my Mother and Papa!"

The fishermen were shocked to find a little girl alone in the water. In turn, one of them offered, "Come into the boat" and quickly threw a rope ladder over the side. Dandi replied that she couldn't and showed her fin. "A mermaid!" One of the men exclaimed. "Catch it!" another yelled! Several of the men rushed for their nets. Dandi was terrified: she did not want to be caught in a net like a fish! Quickly she dove under the surface of the waves, racing for the deep. She swam and she swam until she felt like she couldn't swim anymore.

As she stopped to rest on a rock covered in sea moss, she found herself quite alone. She could not possibly go back, not after what had happened. The wild look in the eyes of the fishermen scared her, and they wanted to catch her in a net like she was a fish. "I'm a person," Dandi muttered to herself, "but I'm also a mermaid." In that moment she felt angry. "That old man did this to me," she whimpered to herself. "I don't know how or why, but that wizard did this to me!"

Over the coming weeks and months, Dandi grew accustomed to living in the sea. She would eat green seaweed and salty scallops from the seafloor and

swim wherever she wanted. She tried to make friends. First, she tried bonding with the sea stars, but they never seemed to do much. Then she attempted to play tag with the manta rays and tuna, but they were always too busy to chat. Instead, she often spent time with a friendly pod of dolphins who she found to be quite smart. They would talk of their travels, play games, and were really quite social creatures. But they only seemed interested in themselves, and they still weren't people. Dandi truly missed people! Yet there was nothing she could do to return home and time continued to pass.

A year passed by, then another, and then a third. One day when Dandi was feeling angry about the old man, a great storm arose. It was unlike any that Dandi had seen before. She curiously swam to the surface to see lightning, wind, and the most violent waves of water she had ever encountered. She decided to return to the safety of the sea floor, but in that moment she was struck on the head by something. And then everything went black.

As Providence would have it, Dandi washed upon the shore of a little sandy beach near the outlet of a river. And there while she slept, she was spotted by a little flock of friendly birds. "A mermaid on the shore, what a strange sight in deed," they chirped to each other. "Let us find our friend, the bear. He is big and smart; he will know what to do." The birds flew and quickly found the bear who was hunting salmon just up the river. "Come and see, a sleeping mermaid lies on the beach, perhaps she needs help," they cheeped.

The curious bear nodded and followed the birds to the beach. He'd never seen a mermaid before. As he looked upon her, he decided she was neither a meal like a fish nor something to be feared like a person. For she was neither! He gently poked her with one of his paws. Dandi woke, to see the face of a bear. She was frightened and screamed. The bear spoke, "Don't be afraid. My name is Chance. Are you hurt?"

Dandi didn't know what to think. She had never heard of a talking bear before. He continued, "Can you hear me?" Dandi paused and replied, "Yes... I can speak. I'm sorry, but I've never met a talking bear before." Chance replied "and I've never met a mermaid before." "Oh, but I'm not a mermaid," Dandi insisted. "At least I didn't used to be. I'm a little girl and a long time ago I was turned into a mermaid."

All in all, Chance seemed quite nice. Because he was so willing to listen, Dandi told him everything she could remember. She recalled the fence, the old man who had turned her into a mermaid and taken her from her parents. She described her encounter with the fishermen and her long time at sea. She admitted how angry she was at the man and how lonely she was for her mom, papa, people, and anyone. Chance could see she was quite sad. When she finished her story and went quiet, he quickly picked her up in his arms and held her. It had been so long since Dandi had been hugged. It felt so good, she cried tears of joy. Holding her, the kindly bear began to carry her up the river. "Here, I'll take you up to my den," he offered. "I have blue berries and a comfortable place for you to rest," he added. Dandi was excited at the thought of yummy berries. It had been a very long time since she'd eaten anything that wasn't from the sea. "Tomorrow I'll take you to the pool up the river. It's warm and clear and oh, so much nicer than the sea," Chance promised.

When Dandi and the Bear arrived to the den, he set her down upon his lap and began to feed her. The berries tasted so sweet and juicy. Dandi couldn't help but eat handful after handful until she was full. She said "thank you, Chance" and found that she began to feel very sleepy. Chance let her sleep in his lap, and he wrapped his fuzzy arms around her to keep her warm.



In the morning Chance let Dandi sleep in past sunup. After a while she woke and Chance reminded her, “Now it’s time for you to go to the pool.” He set her down, stood up, and then picked her up again in his arms to carry her. The pool wasn’t very far away, and they soon arrived. Chance carefully approached the edge and released Dandi, letting her slowly slip into the clear,

warm water. Dandi surfaced and expressed gratitude, "I like this water very much. It's warm and clear and there's no salt, thank you Chance." Chance dived into the pool, making a great bear splash! He surfaced, and Dandi laughed, splashing water in his face with her hands. Chance sprayed her back and the two had such a wonderful time.

That night Chance took Dandi back to the den and they slept as before. The next day and everyday Chance would wake Dandi, feed her berries, then take her to the pool while he foraged for food. Sometimes the little flock of birds would come and visit. They would wade and splash about in the small puddles near the pool. Every night Dandi and Chance would return to the den and she would slumber in his cozy arms. This went on for the rest of spring and then for part of the summer.

One morning after dreaming, Dandi awoke feeling sad. Chance asked her what was the matter and she admitted: "I love you, Chance, and I'm so grateful for all you've done for me. I'm just so sad because I dreamt I was with my mom and Papa, and now I'm not. I miss them, but I don't think I'll ever see them again." Chance paused for a moment and suggested: "If you miss your family and wish to go, I might know of someone who can help." Then without saying another word, he gave her berries, took her to the pool, and then left.

He was gone the entire day. Dandi worried that something might have happened to him. But just as twilight came, he arrived wearing a big bear grin. "I met the Fairy of the River today," he said. "Tomorrow you'll meet her."

Dandi began to ask question after question, but Chance only replied that she'd meet her tomorrow and all her questions would be answered. Chance fell asleep quickly, but Dandi's mind was still full of many questions. Who was the river fairy? Could she really help her? Was she nice? All these and many more questions raced through Dandi's mind until at last she fell asleep.

At dawn Chance rose and began to carry Dandi, who was still sleeping, to meet the Fairy. After a half an hour, Dandi woke and Chance gave her the small handful of berries he clutched in his paw. Several hours later the two came to a large pool. Chance set Dandi down and then began to call, "Oh fairy, fair and kind, come to the aid of this friend of mine." He repeated again,

“Oh fairy, fair and kind, come to the aid of this friend of mine.” And then a third time, “Oh fairy, fair and kind, come to the aid of this friend of mine.” Upon finishing, he sat down next to Dandi.

After a minute of silence, the River Fairy rose out of the water. It was as if she appeared into thin air from a sparkle of light. Surrounded by the glistening shine of sunlight reflected upon the water, she looked very beautiful. “Hello, Chance,” she said, “I see you've brought your friend. And what might I ask is your name?” Chance was embarrassed he hadn't had the opportunity to introduce her. “My name is Dandi,” Dandi replied. “Chance has been taking care of me, and he told me that you might be able to help.” “Help you with what, my dear?” the Fairy asked.

“Well, I was a girl and I don't know what happened. But a mean old man turned me into a mermaid,” Dandi began. Then she told the story of how she played on the fence and rolled down the hill into the lake. She explained how she saw the old man and then found herself in the sea. She recalled the scary fishermen and her lonely life in the ocean. She also described the big storm and how she met Chance on the beach. She expressed gratitude for how he fed her, took care of her, and brought her here after her sad dream.

“I always knew you were a good bear,” the Fairy commented to Chance. If a bear could blush under all his fur, surely in this moment Chance was doing it. “Now Dandi,” whispered the fairy, “how do you feel?”

Dandi admitted, “I feel sad, and I miss my mom and Papa. I feel angry, too. Why would that old man do this to me? How could he be so cruel?” And then sobbing through her words, she added, “I hate him for what he did to me.” Chance held Dandi as she wept into his soft arms. The fairy waited, and as Dandi quieted, the Fairy spoke: “The magic of this pool has the power to turn you back into a girl again. But it won't work, as long as you hold on to the anger in your heart. You must bathe in this pool of healing for seven days. By then the magic of the water can soften your heart, if you let it. Only then will my power be enough to change you back.”

Dandi was glad for a chance to become a girl again. But she didn't know how to let go of the anger she felt towards the old man, nor did she want to. The Fairy sensed her desire and encouraged her saying, “Dandi, this won't work unless you decide to let go.” And with that, she asked Chance to put her

in the pool. Chance picked her up and said he'd stay nearby and bring her food while she healed. Then in the water he gently placed her.

When she lifted her head above water, the Fairy spoke again, "Promise me you'll think about your family and about the old man. I'll return in seven days. If you've found the will to want to forgive, my magic in the pool will be able to transform you back into a girl. Promise me!"

Dandi wanted so badly to be a girl again, she promised to try. Then she asked, "If I'm turned back into a girl, how will I ever find my way back to my family?" The Fairy replied, "You needn't worry about that now. All will be made right if you can find it in yourself to begin to forgive." And with those words, the Fairy mysteriously disappeared.

Although Chance didn't get into the pool, the two spent the week together. Chance brought Dandi berries as before, and the flock of friendly birds stopped in twice to tweet with the two of them. Day by day Dandi would take time to think about the old man and day by day the magic water did its work. At first Dandi still couldn't see any way that she could forgive the old man. But by the fifth day, she found her mind began to ask questions: What did she know about this man? What was his name? Why did he live alone? Was he unhappy? The more she thought about these questions and others, the more she became curious and began to feel less and less angry.

Then on the morning of the seventh day, she quietly said to herself, "I still hurt inside, but much of my anger is gone. I'm certain that I can one day forgive him. I no longer will hold on to the hurt. Perhaps one day a long time in the future I might meet him?" Then as if the River Fairy could hear everything, she mysteriously appeared. "The magic of the water and your choice to consider him is enough," stated the Fairy. "This doesn't lessen that what he did to you was wrong, but it means that you no longer have to live as a mermaid."

And with the words of the Fairy, Dandi felt herself lifted from the water. Bright light surrounded her, covering her body in its golden beams. Chance and a few of the birds, who happened to be around, watched in awe, as the magic light restored her fin to two perfectly good legs for walking. It set her down on the edge of the pool and the light quickly faded.

Dandi looked down at her legs and stood up for the first time in years. Her legs were quite wobbly, and she was glad when Chance came close and allowed her to steady herself on his paw. She took her first few steps then hugged him lingering for a moment. She turned and stared for a moment at the Fairy then inquired, "But what about my parents? How will I ever find my family?" The River Fairy replied: "They're closer than you think."

Then pointing to the woods on the opposite side of the river, she added, "Go through the woods and you'll soon find a little path. Head right and follow it for three miles. One for each year you were away from your family. You'll soon find yourself near the lake and within sight of your parents' home."

Dandi was completely overjoyed. Then she turned to see Chance. The big bear looked sad and from one of his eyes fell a tear. Dandi embraced him; and as he picked her up, she hugged him again in his big gentle arms. For a moment neither of them said anything. Then Dandi broke the silence by saying, "I love you, Chance, and I'll never forget you."

Chance replied, "And I... will never forget you, little Dandi."

They continued to hug for a moment and then Chance carefully set her down upon her feet and said, "Go to your mom and Papa, Dandi. A bear's den is no place for a girl." Dandi wiped away a tear and then turning to the woods, began to make her way there. When she came to the edge, she looked back to see the River Fairy and her dear friend Chance one last time. "Goodbye" she said. Then holding back a tear, she confidently entered the woods.

True to the words of the Fairy, Dandi soon found the path. Following it to the right as she was told, Dandi walked on for what seemed like much longer than three miles. Finally, over the top of a hill Dandi looked down to see the lake. She carefully rushed down and over in the direction of her parents' home. As she approached, she could see a little smoke coming from the chimney that sat atop the house, signaling that someone was home. She came to the door and lifting her hand knocked, her father answered and for a moment seemed to not think she was real. Then in a moment of the most exquisite joy, he picked her up. Her mother was there, too. Words cannot describe the tears of joy and the sounds of rejoicing that were made in that little house that day.



Once they had all calmed, Dandi recounted all that had happened to her. She explained how she had played on the fence, rolled down the hill, seen the suspicious old man, landed in the lake, and then washed out to sea. She described her discovery that she was a mermaid, of all the creatures she had met, and of the scary fishermen and storm. Then she recalled how she awoke on a beach and met Chance; how he took care of her and how the magic of the River Fairy helped her to return to being a little girl. Lastly, she told how she came through the woods and found their home. Her parents regarded her return as a joyful act of Providence. They informed her that it had been two years since the old man had passed away.

About four years later on the eve of Dandi's 14th birthday, she felt compelled to go visit the grave of the old man for the first time. When she arrived, she paused then said, "I'm sorry for playing on your fence. Although it was wrong of you to turn me into a mermaid, I forgive you. See these pretty flowers? I brought them for you to show you that I no longer feel angry for what you did to me. I'll bring fresh ones here every day."

As the words left her mouth, it was as if a joyful sigh from the earth under the grave could be heard. It was as if her words had relieved some strain of guilt of deeds long done, and replaced it with a quiet happiness that the soul buried there would be remembered. But perhaps more importantly, Dandi was at peace and all who met her saw the same energetic smile that she had been born with, for she was truly happy!

The End



The Church Frog



There once was a frog, green as the grass, and well fed on flies. At night he'd emerge from his hiding place in the pond, seat himself on a lily pad, and croak until morning. But unlike other frogs, his croaks were not of joy or delight. Instead, he could only grumpily complain. He moaned over the small size of his pond. He made a fuss about the murky water, and he even criticized the flies he would eat. Other frogs who knew him had long given up saying anything to him about it. Once a friendly newt had given him a delicious mayfly with golden wings. A special gift! The frog ate it up in an instant; but instead of being grateful for the rare treat, all he could utter to the newt was how it wasn't nearly as good as the last one he'd eaten. He was a very ungrateful frog indeed.

One Sunday morning while he was napping near his hiding place, a young boy with quick hands spied him and swiftly scooped him up. Holding him tight the boy looked into his face. The frog thought the boy very scary and held himself as still as he could. Just then the boy's mother called for him. Stuffing the frog into the big pocket of his pants, the boy took off running. The frog was terribly uncomfortable in the boy's pocket and feared that this was his end. Climbing into a wagon, the boy sat silent on the ride to town and did his best to hide the squirming frog from his parents.

At last the wagon came to a stop. Tying up the mule, the family proceeded to enter an old chapel that sat in the middle of town. They were greeted by a cheery priest and proceeded up the aisle to sit in the pews. It was then the frog lifted his head a little from the boy's pocket and peered around with one of his little eyes. The chapel was made of wood and stone and appeared to be quite old. Feeling uptight and longing for freedom from the boy's pocket, the frog began to squirm more than ever before. As the service began, the boy's parents intently listened to the sermon. Quietly the boy pulled the frog out of

his pocket and began to play with him. Although he was in an unfamiliar place, the frog waited for his chance to escape.



As the sermon paused for a hymn, the Frog saw the chance he had been waiting for and made a hopping break for the wooden floor. As quickly as he could, he leapfrogged past feet and bags towards the back of the chapel. Swiftly the little boy dropped down on his knees to retrieve his pet. To the frog's relief, the boy's mother seated the boy back into the wooden pew and demanded he stay put. Reaching the back of the chapel, the frog hid in a dusty and unkept corner. He wanted to escape, but the giant people intimidated him. As he sat there as still as a stone, the notes and lyrics of the interlude seemed to echo in his mind. "All Creatures give thanks to the Lord."

At the end of the service, the people rose and began to exit the chapel through the rear door. The frog could see that the same light entering through the windows was coming through the exit; but for fear of being seen, he dared not leave as long as any human was near. The boy intently searched for him, but the frog kept out of sight by hopping back under a pew. When he was sure the boy had left, the frog peered out to see the last of the people file out and thank the priest. The organist had also lingered behind and continued to play a steady tune. Then before the frog knew what was happening, the priest closed and locked the door. Frantically hopping towards the door the frog pressed his

small body up against its immeasurable weight. The organ stopped, and not seeing the frog, the priest proceeded to the front of the chapel. There he quickly blew out the lamp and exited through the opposite door with the organist.

Being too late, but hoping to find another way out, the frog urgently began to hop around the edges of the chapel. First, he inspected the rear door with his little eyes and then the front again. There was no way through. "How could this have happened to me?" he croaked to himself. Checking the remainder of the chapel and down the hallway, he found no other way for a small frog to escape. Until the doors were opened again, he was completely trapped inside. Beginning to feel thirsty and knowing that he needed water to live, the frog frantically began to search the entirety of the building. Yet, as he hopped around the walls and the corners of the building, he began to feel very dry and dusty. The feeling only made his search more frenzied. Finally, he began to grow tired. Sitting still, he told himself that he would rest here and continue the search when he awoke. The last thing he grumbled to himself before falling asleep was simply, "How horrid a dry place like this was!"

Several hours later, he awoke to loud claps of thunder and bright flashes of lightning. Outside he could hear the sweet sound of rain beating against the sides of the old church. His dry skin and tongue longed for the rain. Returning to the door, he flailed his body and thumped his head against the door in desperation. After a time he grew tired and though he was quite dried out he cried himself to sleep. A little before dawn, he awoke again to another sound. Drip, drip, drip! At first he thought it a dream. But again came the sound, drip, drip, drip! "Water!" he exclaimed. Following the sound, he joyously found a leak from the roof in a crack in the wall. Nesting himself inside the crack, he felt the cool water droplets upon his skin. In that moment, it seemed nothing in the world could feel as good. And with that he fell asleep again.

After a few hours, his hunger woke him and he desperately began to hunt for food. "It was never this hard to find food at my lily pad," he croaked to himself. With his hearing and keen eyes, he began his search at the front of the chapel. Going up and down the walls, he scanned past the pews. Then up and down the hallway, passing the crack in the wall until he came back to where he started. Not having found anything, he began again and combed through every inch of the church until finally he stumbled upon a dead fly.

Unlike the fresh flies near his pond, this fly didn't look very good to eat. How he missed the food and freedom of his home! Knowing he might not find much else to eat, he devoured the fly. It tasted terrible. This fly might be the last thing I ever eat he thought to himself. Not finding anything else, he soon gave up his search and retired to the crack in the wall. There he began to wait, waiting for what he didn't know. Perhaps it was a chance to escape or perhaps it was death?

Hours passed and the organist arrived through the back door, sat down at the organ, and began to play. The frog, hearing the beautiful music, left the crack in the hope that he might finally get out. Keeping his distance, but aligning himself with the door, he eagerly awaited as the organist continued to play. After a time the organist began to sing and the frog found himself entranced by the song: "Earth and Heaven in joyous accord, all creatures give thanks to the Lord." Suddenly the organist stopped playing, muttering that she was late. Before the frog could move three hops, she was up and out the door. The frog's mood grew sad and dark, and he burst into little frog tears. He had missed his chance to escape! He sat there sulking; and then after a time, he retired to his damp crack in the wall.

In the morning he awoke and something seemed different. The drips of water had stopped and a few termites had crawled out to eat the soft wood dampened by the rain. The frog was overjoyed and gobbled them all up as quickly as he could. He felt quite full and found that for the moment at least, he had energy. And so the rest of the day, he returned to searching for a way of escape. That evening he retired again to his now dry crack in the wall. For the next three days, he continued his search, but all his efforts were unsuccessful. To his dismay, neither the organist nor the termites returned. And as if the crack itself had begun to mock him it grew dryer and dryer. Oh, how I miss my pond! Oh, how I miss the food! Oh, how I miss the company of every creature there! He wept to himself.

On the fourth day, he grew very tired and dry. By the fifth day, the frog was so parched and hungry, that he had nearly given up hope. He had lost the ability to sleep and had not returned to the crack in the wall. All he could think of was how much he missed his previous comfy circumstances. He was so tired, dry, and lost in thought that as people came in for the Sunday service,

he paid them no mind. The sermon commenced and still he did not stir. Finally, it concluded with the hymn “All Creatures Give Thanks to the Lord.” As the hymn played, the frog thought to himself, If only I was at my pond, then I too would give thanks.

As the people were filling out, a little girl saw the frog and approached him. She spoke to him, “You look sick, Froggy. You need water, and I know a place to take you.” The frog being too tired, dry, and hungry, was unable to resist. The kind little girl carried him outside to her family's carriage. The frog remembered little of the ride, only that he heard the little girl call out when her family was about to pass the pond. Exiting the carriage, she carefully carried him to the water's edge. As the little girl placed him in the water, he felt his life returning to him again. “Bye, Froggie,” she softly whispered. She waited only a moment before returning to the carriage to depart.



Back in his pond, the frog quickly recovered and told every creature in and around, about the little girl who returned him home. To the other frogs and the salamander, he expressed how much he had missed their company. Day by day, and night by night, his skin became the deepest green you ever did see.

And with it, he became a very grateful and pleasant fellow. Soon he had many children and to all of them he recalled the story of the little girl and taught them the song he had heard in the church. As each tad pole and froglet grew to be of age and had children, they also shared the story of the little girl and taught the song to their children. Some say to this very day that if you go quietly to the pond late at night and listen, that you can hear the happy croaks of frogs singing: “Every bear and bird and froglet sing, all creatures give thanks to God the King. Earth and Heaven in joyous accord, all creatures give thanks to the Lord.”

The End



Journey to the Temple of the Serpent



Across the sea where lush green mountains still meet the sands of the dry desert, there once was a son of a Great King. His name was Rupert and he lived with all the comforts and wealth that he could possibly desire. From archery, to fencing, hunting, and defending the kingdom, Rupert had been taught all the knowledge and royal training befit a king. After each lesson, his father would say to him “Lesser men may forget my son. But a King must always remember the lessons he is taught.”

On the day of his 16th birthday, Rupert was taken by his father deep into the heart of the castle to a great hall where he had never before walked. The hall was empty except for an ornate door, white like the color of the most perfect pearl that stood at the far end of the hall. “My son,” the King declared: “I will soon go to rest with my ancestors, someone must lead the kingdom in my absence. I have given you nearly all I could give and now you must be tested.”

Prince Rupert looked up in wonder at the door. At the center was carved his family’s royal crest, a ring of flowers surrounding a falcon. After a moment, he approached it and traced the carvings with his finger until he came upon a circular indentation about the size of his fist. It was then that his father continued: “You must return with the treasure of the great Serpent, an Asteria stone. With it open this door. Only then can you be counted worthy to be king.”

After a moment, Rupert’s father led him out of the chamber. His mind was filled with questions: Would he see his father again? Would he return to the castle? Where would he find the treasure of the great serpent?

“Father,” the young man asked, “Where will I find the treasure?” His father instructed, “You must go out into the world and journey to the vale and town

at the foot of the mountain containing the Library of Knowledge. There you will learn where you must go to find the treasure.”

“That’s such a long way” Rupert remarked apprehensively. “It is, my son, but princes and princesses from kingdoms far and wide have taken this same journey for a thousand years. Like them, you will not go unequipped. I stated that I had given you nearly all I could give, and so I have two more gifts for you: The first is a magic cloth given to me by my father. It will provide shelter for you in a storm, keep you warm in the night, and cool in the day. The second is an enchanted pack that is light as a feather and will always have what you need.”

“Thank you, father” replied the prince. Then the old King added, “Beware of those who would distract you from your journey.” And with that, the son of the king was given a map and left his comfortable home equipped with all he’d need to make the long journey across the wilderness.

On his first day of travel beyond the edge of the kingdom, Rupert enjoyed the lovely sights of the fresh fields of grain and green grass. He stumbled upon a suitable walking stick and that night he slept under a tree using his pack as a pillow and the magic cloth to keep him warm. On the second day, he waded through a marsh and began his steep ascent into the rocky mountains. That night he slept surprisingly well on a flat rock under the stars in the cool mountain air. On the third day of his journey, Prince Rupert entered the wilds, where for the next three weeks he continued his journey south-east, only stopping to eat from his pack and sleep using the magic cloth.

With only the tall trees and small creatures on the trail, Rupert found his trip to be a little lonely. “It won’t be long and I’ll be at the Library, so I must press on,” Rupert encouraged himself. The following day, Rupert fashioned himself a walking staff and climbed to the top of a nearby ridge to get his bearings. From the top, he could see the opening in the mountains that led to the Library of Knowledge. He continued to follow the ridge which became quite rocky, then going down the makeshift trail he began to switch back and forth. Late in the day, he arrived at the town and the entrance to the Library.

Eager to gain the required knowledge, he entered, still wearing his pack. Behind a stone table a man sat upright. “Sir, where might I find a book that will guide me to the treasure of the great serpent?” The Prince asked.

“Ahhh, you seek The Book of the Rulers. My name is Anki. Please, take this lamp and follow me.”

The Prince took what appeared to be a clear shard of crystal and immediately it lit up like a lantern. Rupert held it for a moment, surprised that although it illuminated, it did not feel hot. With each of them holding a shard, Anki led Rupert across the dimly lit room and down, down, and down three flights of steps. At the far end of the bottom room past countless books in a corner that seemed far less traveled than the top floor of the library, they stopped. At about eye level to Rupert, Anki pulled an ancient but fine looking book from the shelf. He handed it to Rupert who felt its smooth leather bound cover. In the light of the crystal lamp he could see that it had ornate metal engravings with a crowned serpent on the front. “This is what you seek,” advised Anki. And after pausing for a moment he added, “The mountain won’t allow the book to leave the library. We have a place where you may rest yourself for the night and read.”

Rupert didn’t know what the mountain would do if he attempted to leave with the book, but he decided he didn’t want to find out. The Prince was then led back to the first floor to a pile of animal skins and rugs. There he made himself comfortable and began to read from the ancient text. Rupert poured over the book and took courage in finding that his way across the desert passed through an oasis and the Temple of the Serpent was near a town on the far side of the desert. The Prince read that the serpent posed a question to all those seeking a part of its treasure. What sort of question will the serpent ask me? Rupert thought to himself.

Specifically, the book warned that all those who continued the journey would be compelled to forget who they were and for what they’d first left to obtain. Feeling content with the knowledge of the path he was to follow, the Prince closed the book and fell asleep. An hour after dawn, he awoke to find that bread and meat had been left for him. Eating his fill, he returned to the entrance of the library and handed The Book of the Rulers to Anki.

“So you’re eager to leave then?” Anki asked. “Yes, thank you for your help and hospitality.” The Prince replied. “You’re most welcome,” Anki responded. “But I wish you to leave, knowing one more thing that may prove vital to your journey: Many others have come before you. Some have met with success and their children have returned to make the same journey. Still others have come, gone, and never been heard of again. Remember that and remember your purpose,” Anki added. Rupert thanked him again and departed, promising himself that he’d never forget his true purpose.

A moment later, Rupert was on the trail leaving town. Then only a short while later, he entered the dry desert. At the time he did not realize that he had entered it, only that at some point the solid ground he walked on had turned into sand. Soon Rupert found himself trudging through great mountains of sand. Amongst the dunes in the heat of the day, he quickly grew tired. “I need to rest,” he said to himself. Using the magic sheet as a cover, he put it over himself and the staff he had fashioned in the wilds. Then securing the bottom inside under the weight of his pack, he made a simple tent. Pleased with how well he’d done and finding it quite cool inside, he settled in for a nap.

Rupert awoke to the dark of the evening; and finding that he was well rested, continued his journey. He navigated by the stars and kept to his path by the light of the moon. The sounds of a soft wind blowing across the sand and the occasional howl of some distant creature were all that accompanied him through the night. For the next six nights he traveled. During the scorching sand filled days, he rested.

At the dawn of the seventh day, he came to the oasis. Taking a moment to refresh with the cool waters, he found that he wasn’t alone. A great caravan of traders carrying goods and wealth on the backs of camels had taken pause to rest. After Rupert’s arduous travel, the only thing more welcoming than fresh water was to see people. “From whence are you?” their leader asked.

“My name is Rupert, and I’ve traveled to search for the treasure of the great serpent, so that I may be found worthy to claim my Father's throne,” Rupert told them.

The caravan leader, having seen his kind before, seemed glad. He announced in a welcoming tone, “We have just come from the town near the Temple of the Serpent. My name is Charon. A word of advice: you shouldn’t

tell everyone where you are from. There are those who would see you as an enemy or as prey. They would try to end or distract you from your journey.”

It hadn't occurred to Rupert that someone might want to hurt or stop him, so he resolved to keep quiet about his origin and purpose. Shaking hands, Charon pointed in the distance saying: “The town you are searching for is a two days' journey east of here. It will be easy to spot. When you arrive, speak with Vasa. Tell him Charon sent you and he will give you lodgings.”



“Thank you!” the Prince expressed. “Our time is short and we must go,” cited Charon. And with that, Charon and his company departed heading into the desert in the direction the Prince had already trod. Rupert watched them ride off; and when they were far off, it seemed as if by some magic they mysteriously disappeared. Rupert thought nothing of it, but instead rested at the oasis for the length of the day. He departed at twilight for the town and continued all night pausing for rest again when the sun rose. The following

night at about half past one in the morning, he saw the flash of multicolored lights, music, and bustling noise of Carnival.

He soon entered and what a fantastic sight it was! Although it was the middle of the night, lights lit nearly every square inch of the town. Music came from what seemed to be a hundred different places and the smell of delicious breads, meats, and fruit permeated the air. Amazed and curious, Rupert began to wander the cobble stone streets. He'd never seen a place so fantastic and bright with color. In one area there were long lines of people waiting at the feet of giant structures with things called rides. In another, people relaxed, looking down from the tops of lovely garden buildings. In another people, packed tightly into dimly lit rooms singing and dancing. It was here that the music was the loudest. None of these, however, was as large as the district called Market.

The Market was full of painted booths and shops made of wood, iron, and glass that seemed to go on forever. Although most were closed at night, it seemed that everything imaginable could be bought: any toy, any garment, or experience that could be imagined. Some sold words, some sold magic things, some sold lights, some strange foods, and some even sold themselves. Rupert thought all these things very interesting indeed. Before he knew it, not only had the sun come up, but it was midday. Feeling very tired, Rupert sought a place to stay. He remembered the merchant from the day before who had said to speak with Vasa. Rupert decided to ask someone where he could find him. To his luck and further amazement, the first man he spoke to confirmed: "Yes, I know Vasa, everyone does. He lives near the southwest corner of the city and he'll give you lodgings. You'll know the building by its blue color. You won't miss it."

With a thanks, Rupert headed off through the streets in the direction the man had pointed. A few minutes later, he stood in front of the large blue building and went inside. Behind the desk was a stout man with dark hair and a name pinned on his clothes. "Are you Vasa?" Rupert asked. "Yes, I am," replied the man, "I assume you're looking for lodgings and a comfortable bed?" To Rupert, it had seemed like forever since he'd rested in a soft bed. "Yes," Rupert tiredly expressed. "I assume you have no money?" inquired Vasa. "That's right," Rupert maintained. It hadn't occurred to him that the

lodgings would cost money. "No matter," Vasa uttered, "When you're rested, you can earn what you owe easily in the Market. Someone is always looking for help there." Rupert was glad for the bed and the chance to easily pay what he owed. He thanked the man and retired to his room where he quickly fell asleep.

Rupert slept that afternoon and through the night, waking at dawn the following morning. Eager to pay his bill and seek the Temple of the Serpent, he ran to the market. There he found a man with dark hair and bushy eyebrows needing help setting up his shop. "My hired hand left to work for someone else, would you like to work in my shop?" he offered. Rupert agreed and helped the man setup and run the shop for the remainder of the day. At the end of the day, the man paid Rupert and asked if he could return tomorrow. Rupert stated, "I must be off tomorrow, but if I stayed, I'd gladly come back."

The man was disappointed, but he wished Rupert luck in his departure. On his way back, a stone carving of a falcon in a corner shop caught Rupert's eye. It seemed to be calling to him as if it was enchanted by some magic spell. Looking at the money he'd earned, he thought to himself, Surely this money is more than enough to pay for my lodgings? I can buy this to have something to remember my time in Carnival. To his surprise, when he looked up to see the shopkeeper, it was none other than Charon. "Charon! I thought you'd left" said Rupert. "Yes, my friend, I did, and now I am back to sell you some of my wares. You fancy the carving of a falcon, I see?" Charon replied.

"Yes, I do, but will I have enough money for my lodgings?" Rupert inquired. "Let's see what you have, my friend," Charon replied. In response, Rupert showed him the money he'd earned. Charon said "That will be more than enough for these and your lodgings, here." And with that, Charon took a portion of the money and gave Rupert the beautiful carving of the falcon. Rupert pleased with himself thanked Charon and returned to the large blue building to speak with Vasa. Unfortunately, the price for the lodgings had gone up only two days before. Vasa apologized to Rupert, saying that "It was the nature of the business and the climate of Carnival that forced him to make the change."

Vasa accepted what Rupert had; and though Rupert was a little disappointed, he returned to his comfortable bed thinking, I can earn the

money I need tomorrow. If I'm going to be working again, I certainly don't want to sleep on anything but this comfortable bed tonight. And with that Rupert went to bed. The following morning Rupert returned to help the shopkeeper. The shopkeeper was overjoyed and together they had a very profitable day. At the end of the day, Rupert returned to the large blue building and found again that he didn't have enough money to pay for all his lodgings. As with the night before, he went to bed intending to pay enough the following day to leave Carnival and continue his journey.

Over the following days and weeks, Rupert discovered each night that he did not have enough to pay. Slowly his collection of toys, trinkets, and conveniences grew. With each purchase from Charon, the magic of Carnival took a stronger and stronger hold upon him. The importance of his journey and the urgency to leave seemed to wane. After a while he stopped asking Vasa how much he still owed. He found a group of friends, who day after day and night after night would, visit one shop and venue after another. Rupert had never had this much fun in all his life!

Then one day something happened that made him forget all about his journey to find the great treasure of the serpent. He met a girl named Dayla. He first saw her selling trinkets at a booth around the corner from his. Rupert spoke with her; and after inviting her to join him and his friends in their adventures around Carnival, they too became fast friends. Their interests were very similar and they enjoyed most of the same foods. Every day after work, they'd meet and spend the evening together talking, playing games, dancing, and a whole host of other exciting things.

In addition, they began to hold hands, and Rupert soon came to feel that he'd like to be with Dayla forever. One evening he told her how he felt and Rupert was overjoyed to hear her say the same. That night he went home, feeling as light as a feather knowing nothing could spoil the joy he felt. As Rupert laid down to go to sleep, he felt something under him. Turning himself over, he found a letter that had been placed upon his bed. Curious, he turned it over to find the royal seal of his father. Shocked and realizing he'd forgotten all about his journey, he quickly opened the letter and read its contents: "My son, I will soon go to rest with my fathers, and you must lead the kingdom in my absence. This is my last gift to you and now you must choose. Carnival

makes you forget and it is not uncommon for a future king to forget his journey. The challenge lies in remembering and choosing to complete this quest so that you may return with the Asteria Stone. Only then can you be counted worthy to be king. This letter is my last message to you. I love you, my son. Signed your father the King.”

Rupert found enclosed with the letter enough money to pay any debt he had incurred, but he didn't know what to think. Thoughts of regret flooded his mind as he realized that it had been more than a year since he had first left his father's kingdom. He felt glad for the letter from his father, but if he left he would leave so much behind. People, things, trinkets, and the hardest of all, Dayla. How could he leave her? How could he tell her? The feeling made him sick. After a couple hours, he at last resolved to tell her, knowing that if he delayed, he would risk forgetting again and could become lost. For there wouldn't be any more letters. With his mind made up, he finally fell asleep.

The sun woke Rupert and he rushed to Dayla's booth in the District of Market. When he saw her, he was surprised to see that she too looked sad. He said they needed to talk and she agreed. “Dayla, I love you,” he confessed, looking at the ground. “It's hard for me to explain, but I have to go and I can't stay with you here in Carnival anymore. It's my father: he sent me a letter and I have to leave.”

Dayla tenderly lifted his head. Rupert was surprised to see she was smiling. From her pocket, Dayla pulled out a letter. “I thought there was something special about you,” she paused. “I have a letter from my father, too. I'm to go to the Temple of the Great Serpent and seek an Asteria Stone. I've come to Market today only to take down my booth. We're on the same journey!”

Shedding tears, they hugged and after a moment of silence between them in the busy street he said: “Where are you from?” Dayla replied, “I'm from the kingdom of Lisdale.” “So we're from neighboring kingdoms then,” Rupert asserted, “What joy! Let's go to the Temple of the Great Serpent together!”

Hand in hand, they nearly ran to the blue building where Rupert paid Vasa all that he owed. Rupert picked up his pack and sheet, but left all the things he had obtained from Carnival. As they walked out the door, they were greeted by the voice of Charon. “My friends, where are you going?”

Rupert revealed. "We have paid our debts and are leaving now." Charon replied, "Oh, and I am sad to see you go, but I am glad you have paid your debts. Come to the market and let us dine to celebrate."

"I'm so sorry," Rupert apologized, "We've loved your company, but we can't dine with you. We must leave now; otherwise, we may forget." Charon was silent and it seemed as if he might be angry. Rupert and Dayla, not wanting to be distracted quickly, bid him goodbye and departed. They left from the town heading in the direction they remembered on the eastern side. After a short while, a sudden sandstorm churned up and came upon them. Rupert and Dayla used the magic sheet to cover their heads. By some magic, it seemed to shield them completely from the wind and sand and they were safely able to continue their journey in spite of the storm around them. After an hour, they could see the square stone structure of the Temple rising above the sand. When, as if from the storm itself, they heard a familiar voice that spoke to them. "You will not leave my city and live!" It threatened.

Afraid, Rupert and Dayla hurried towards the Temple. Passing between two large stone pillars, they entered the calm of its structure. As they walked into the center of the room, there was a sudden loud rush and in a moment The Great Serpent was before them. Its voice echoing throughout the Temple, it inquired. "What do you seek?" Before they could answer, another voice from the entrance of the Temple angrily replied. "I seek these two who belong in my city." Rupert knew that voice: it was the voice of the storm and the voice of Charon! Charon walked into the room with a sword in hand. "What claim do you have?" Replied the serpent. "All who enter my city and stay become mine," Charon declared.



The Serpent paused looking at Rupert, Dayla, and then at Charon. Then it declared, “They have paid their debts and left. They owe nothing to you or your town, but I can see that you wish to harm them.” In an instant the Serpent struck and a moment later he’d wholly devoured Charon, leaving nothing behind but his sword lying on the stone floor. Before Rupert and Dayla could say anything, the Serpent spoke again. “Don’t be afraid, for you are not as he. I won’t harm you. Now, what do you seek?”

Still a little shaken, Rupert and Dayla replied in unison: “We seek the treasure of Kings, an Asteria Stone so that we may inherit our fathers’ thrones.”

“For that, you must answer my question,” insisted the Serpent: “What have you learned?” Rupert and Dayla talked amongst themselves for a moment and

then declared, “We learned to always remember even though it’s easy to forget. On our journeys here, we both forgot, but our fathers reminded us.”

The Great Serpent spoke again: “Your words are true. Forever must you keep the letters your fathers gave to you. They will help to remind you of what you should be in hours of hardship and trouble. For Kings and Queens must remember the lessons they are taught.”

The Serpent paused then continued “You have both remembered and chosen to return to your course. You are fit to be a King and you are fit to be a Queen.” And with that, before each of them appeared an Asteria Stone lying on the ground before them. They both knelt down to pick them up; and as they did, the Great Serpent added, “Pass on this lesson.” Then in an instant he was gone.

As if favored by the Heavens, Rupert and Dayla made their long journey home without incident. When the time came for each to part their way toward their neighboring kingdoms they lovingly paused to give the other a gift. To Dayla, Rupert bestowed the magic sheet his father had given him. To Rupert, Dayla presented an amulet with the crest of her father's house. Each promised to meet the other again soon. So Rupert returned to his castle and to the white stone door where his journey had begun. He carefully placed the stone in its place in the great door and it opened to a room of exquisite whiteness. To Rupert's surprise, inside he found letters from all the Kings who had gone before him from their fathers, each with the Asteria Stone they had brought from the Temple of the Great Serpent. Above all of them were carved these words “A King must always remember the lessons he is taught.” It was then Rupert knew he’d never again forget.

The End



The Silver Fruit



Deep in the forests of an ancient kingdom, there once roamed beautiful herds of deer with antlers like the branches of a tree, fur like the color of newly browned leaves, and a dignified stride like no other breed of animal alive. Upon each branch grew the most beautiful silver fruit that would never spoil. Many a hunter hungered for the prized fruit and the meat of the deer who carried it. But the deer were quick, smart, and always ready to escape their reach. Yet the hunters were very cunning, and in the process of time the deer were hunted until there were fewer and fewer who lived. Until at last the fateful day came when the last doe was shot. You'd think this to be a sad ending to our story, but luckily she had a fawn.

Although small and alone, this fawn was gifted with all the intelligence and speed of his ancestors. He'd sprint from place to place through the woods, seeking plants, acorns, and twigs to eat. All the while he kept alert for danger. One day in a field not far from his forest he was careless, and spent too long in the open. A hunter found him and though he was quick he was shot in one of his hind legs. Managing to escape, the fragile fawn hid in the brush near the edge of the field. He kept quiet for what seemed like hours, hoping the hunter would not find the place where he lay. After a time the fawn grew very tired. Although he was hurt, he fell asleep.

While he slept, an old woman who lived nearby who had been out picking bramble berries stumbled upon him. She moved ever so quietly and saw his wound. Since he was nearly still a fawn, she resolved to return with her cart. To be sure he wouldn't run off without receiving care, she quietly tied a rope to him and to the nearest bush. Then she left to fetch her cart, planning to quickly return.



Before her return, the fawn awoke fearfully. Upon seeing that he was tied, he attempted to free himself, but was unsuccessful in getting the rope to budge. When the old woman arrived with her donkey and cart, he was even more frightened and struggled for a time. But the old woman was stronger than she looked. She'd lived years in her little cottage alone at the edge of the forest and had to split her own firewood, take care of her donkey, and plant in her garden. The fawn soon saw that in addition to her strength, she was also very kind. She took him home, and carefully took out the metal ball that had pierced his leg, and tenderly dressed his wound. She spoke softly to him saying, "Everything's going to be okay, little fawn. No hunter will ever hurt you here." Then she fed him and stroked his fur until at last he fell asleep.

Over the next few weeks, they grew quite close. They grew so close that she named him Varl. The old woman would bring him the most delicious leaves, berries, and nuts. Then when she fell asleep in her chair, he'd climb into her lap and lick her face.

After several weeks, the fawn's wound healed, leaving only a little scar. The old lady felt that it was time for Varl to go. She cried and told him that she would miss him dearly. But that it was right for him to return to where he

belonged. Varl was grateful for the kindness of the woman and desperately wanted to please her. So he resolved to return to the forest. The two spent the night together. In the morning the woman took him to the edge of the field where she had found him, and gave him one last giant hug. Before he went, she touched upon the stubs of his emerging antlers declaring, "You go now and grow up to be big and strong." And with that she let him go. Pausing once to look back upon the woman who had been so kind to him, the fawn returned to the wood to again run and freely frolic.

Varl thought of her every now and again and was glad for the kindness she had shown him. If only I could have done something for her, he thought. Though now there were fewer hunters, he was still much more careful when roaming the forest. A few months later while taking a drink in a clear spring of water, he noticed something new in his reflection. His antlers had grown; and the loveliest little buds had begun to sprout from them. He'd now matured into a handsome buck!

In the coming weeks the branches of his antlers blossomed and turned into beautiful silver fruit. Varl began to think of himself as quite beautiful. "I'm the most beautiful creature of the forest," he praised himself. "No squirrel, or fox, or bird has such radiant fruit as I have. There are other deer, but none has this stunning silver fruit!" He continued to admire his reflection every day when he took a drink. Day after day, he grew fuller and fuller of himself. Sometimes he would talk down to other animals. "Hello," he'd grunt to a squirrel: "It's too bad you don't have fine silver fruit adorning your head."

It wasn't much later that he began to fancy his fruit as a crown. Most forest creatures either ignored him or thought of him as a nuisance. He continued like this for a year and then another and completely forgot about the old woman's kindness. Perhaps he'd have gone on like this for forever, had he not encountered a wandering man?

Deep in the woods one day as the buck took a nap in his thicket, a bearded man of many years traveling from place to place happened upon him. The buck was in such a deep sleep, he was unaware of the man or really anything for that matter. The man had decided to take a shortcut through the woods, as the road he had been traveling was turning too far west. When to his surprise, he happened upon a sleeping buck with the most beautiful silver fruit hanging

from his antlers. He thought to himself, I must have that fruit. It's so beautiful I want nothing more in this whole world than it! So quietly, patiently he crept towards the buck, then oh so carefully, one by one he plucked the gorgeous fruit from the buck's antlers and put it in his sack. Feeling quite proud of himself, he crept away slowly until he was out of sight. Then the man returned to his travels.



Meanwhile, the forgotten old woman had fallen upon hard times. Her donkey was sick, so during the time she had spent caring for him, she had not planted her garden. Not as if it mattered much anyway, because she needed her donkey to take the long journey into town to buy seed. She also had begun to feel sick and was nearly out of food. So she got on her knees and implored God for help. "Dear God," she prayed, "Please send some help. I'm at the end of my rope, and I don't know what to do."

Just then, the wandering man came over the hill. Seeing the cozy little cottage, he remarked to himself "Perhaps I can find a place to stay the night?" A few moments later, he knocked on the door. The old woman answered; and when he asked if she had lodging for the night, she confirmed that she did and invited him inside. He expected a warm and delicious meal but soon saw how little food she had in her cottage. He immediately thought of the silver fruit he'd taken. It was so beautiful, and he prized it so. Yet the old woman and her donkey were sick and had so very little to eat. In a moment, he found himself giving it to her. It hurt to give it up, but she was grateful. In fact, she was so grateful, she was moved to tears.

In the meantime, the deer had awoken from his nap. He felt his head lighter than usual and a strange scent of a man was upon him. He immediately thought about his precious fruit. Looking down at his shadow, he couldn't see its outline. Quickly he galloped to the stream to check his reflection. He peered in the water and to his horror, the branches of his antlers were empty. He angrily returned to his thicket to find the remaining scent the wandering man had left. Then unlike most deer, instead of running from a strange scent, he closely followed it.

It wasn't long before he came to the cottage. Staring into the window, he saw the old woman and immediately recalled her kindness to him. From outside it appeared something was wrong with her, and he could smell a hint of sickness in the air. The deer strode around the cottage and found the donkey, lying sick in a bed of hay. Returning to the window he saw the fruit. The old woman thanked the man for it; then thanking God, she took a bite. It pained the deer to see someone with his beautiful fruit. Yet after a moment, he could think of no one else he'd rather have it than the sweet woman who had taken care of him. Pulling his head from the window, the bump of his antlers

against the frame alerted the two inside of his presence. Rushing outside, the old woman caught a glimpse of the deer and the scar upon his hind leg. She called out to him; and with only a moment of hesitation, he eagerly ran to her.

Upon reuniting, she tenderly held his head and saw the stems where his fruit had been picked. She instantly knew from where the silver fruit had come. Looking into his eyes, she lovingly placed her hand on his head and said, "Thank You." The buck gave a nod of approval and for a moment lingered. Then feeling content, he returned to the wood slipping between two green bushes and out of sight.

That night the wandering man and the old woman dined on silver fruit. The old woman remarked the following morning how she immediately had begun to feel better. That day, the man departed on an errand into town on foot. A few days later, he returned with seed and food for the old woman and her donkey. Over the coming weeks, the man and the woman grew close. Although they were old, they took a trip into town to be married. The two had never been happier!

Now the deer still continued to look at his reflection in the spring. But instead of feeling vanity and pride, the absence of his fruit merely reminded him of the old woman who had been so kind to him. He began to make occasional visits to the cottage to visit the man and woman living happily together. He continued to do so throughout the summer, fall, and winter. The following spring his fruit returned. Yet, instead of fancying himself beautiful and chosen above others, he chose to let the silver fruit always be a special reminder of the kindness and gratitude shown to him by the old woman, and the help that the silver fruit had brought her in return.

The End



The Tale of the Winged Lion's Paws



Once upon a time a long time ago, there was a kindly Lion like no other. He spent his days on a beautiful hillside overlooking a nearby town in the middle of the woodlands and hills. Many a shepherd with sheep would see him there and take comfort for though he was strong and fierce he was as kind and gentle as could be. So gentle, in fact, many shepherds and lambs would nap at his side in the fields of grass and flowers. While it may seem like a strange thing to you and me, it was perfectly normal for them. It was said that no shepherd or lamb could be safer than when they laid at the Lion's side. The lion lived to a grand old age and killed many a wolf who came to eat people, sheep, and other creatures. On the day of his death, he was called home to dwell with all the angels of heaven. Yet, he loved that hillside and the shepherds and sheep who dwelt and grew up on it. So, in that final moment of joy, he graciously left behind a gift of protection: A pair of winged lion's paws that granted the wearer the appearance and strength of the fierce and gentle Lion.

And so the town began a tradition with every young shepherd boy. Each boy on his first day of watching sheep would put on the Winged Lion's paws one on each foot. Then go atop the hill to watch over the flocks. Soon every shepherd boy knew that if he wore the pair of the Lion's paws, he could run in the direction of any wolf and watch them flee in fear of the Lion they thought was chasing them. This continued for a very long time. Yet over the passage of time, many of the town's folk moved away to towns near the distant seashore. They took their sheep with them until there were no longer any shepherds or sheep in the town. Though there were no longer any shepherds or sheep, the remaining villagers still esteemed the gift of the Lion. So in reverence of the gift, they placed it in the hands of one, they called the keeper of the paws or "the keeper" for short. He watched over them year by year as more and more villagers moved away. Until at last only he remained.

With the departure of the people, ferocious wolves soon returned to the woodlands and hills. It had been such a long time since the Lion's paws had been used, that the wolves fancied themselves rulers of the land. They soon came to oppress and lay violence upon every woodland creature and living thing they could. The most wicked among them was the Queen of the Wolves. She ruled with a cruel paw and required treasure, nuts, berries, and sometimes the lives of the creatures in her domain. Yet for all her power, whispers of the return of the Lion began to echo amongst some of the lesser creatures. First, it started with the squirrels and chipmunks then spread to the rabbits and deer. It wasn't long before every creature in the wolves' domain had heard the rumors of the Lion's return. Hearing the rumors, many of the wolves began to fear they'd come true.

About this time came a family of four settlers. A young girl Madelyn, her baby brother Piper, and her two parents, Tristan and Lucy. They'd traveled far to seek good land to live upon and lost their way. As they happened upon a clearing at the edge of the woodlands, they stopped. The young girl Madelyn stuck her head out of the wagon. Next to her sat her brother Piper and mother, both admiring the beautiful landscape. As Madelyn admired the lively colors of the flowers, bushes, and trees, a light breeze picked up and softly blew, as if inviting them all to stay. Madelyn tucked a lock of her brown hair over her ear and looked at her father who had been leading the horses. "Now this looks like a good spot," he suggested. He turned and glanced up at Madelyn, Lucy, and Piper, and they all agreed.

That evening they made camp near a thicket of wild berries by a beautiful brook. When the sun rose the next morning, Madelyn's father gathered firewood and the rest of the family picked wild berries. Madelyn loved wild berries; and as she picked and ate, she thought to herself, Nothing could possibly taste as good! Every now and then she handed one or two to her little brother, Piper. Piper was messier than Madelyn and smeared the sweet black juice all over his face, then smiled up at her when he wanted more.

Madelyn laughed and both her and Piper ate more and more. Looking up for a moment through a gap in the bushes, Madelyn thought she saw the

figure of a dog or wolf. In an instant, it was gone. “Mother,” Madelyn called, “I saw a wolf, but it disappeared.”

“Your mind must be playing tricks on you, Madelyn. But if you see it again, we’ll let your father know,” her mother asserted. Madelyn continued to pick and eat berries, peeking between the bushes every few moments for the wolf, but she saw nothing. A half hour passed without incident, so Madelyn stopped worrying. By this time Madelyn’s basket was nearly full of berries, she showed her mother her treats.

All of a sudden the pack of wolves and their queen arrived. Around the berry bushes from both sides, they viciously circled Madelyn, Piper, and her mother. In a moment, Tristan, the father, was pushed into the circle with them as well. Madelyn glanced around at what must have been fifty wolves. What were they to do? The wolves were fierce and growled showing their teeth, and it seemed to Madelyn and her family that to run or to fight would be to invite death for all of them. In that moment the Queen of the Wolves appeared with her guard and declared. “I am the Queen of the Wolves, you have trespassed on our land. The penalty is death.” She paused for a moment then continued, “Yet I will grant you your lives if you can satisfy me with a proper payment.”

“But we have nothing” Madelyn’s mother contended. Just then the Queen of Wolves noticed a gleaming broach around her neck. “Fetch the treasure,” she commanded, pointing to the broach. One of her guards rushed forward and grabbed the broach from Madelyn’s mother, bringing it to his queen. She examined it closely and for a moment Madelyn felt as if the Wolf Queen’s gaze drew the amber color of its stone into her eyes.

“This is beautiful,” the Queen proclaimed. “It is unlike any treasure from the wood. It’s is treasure that only people can make. This is enough for me to spare one life,” she declared. “I will require more. Otherwise, three of you will feed me and my pack.”

At that moment Madelyn saw the Queen glare hungrily at her baby brother, Piper. Madelyn shivered, the threatening look at Piper made her feel cold inside like nothing else she’d ever felt or seen.



Her father, Tristan, then spoke, “Your Highness, where will we get the treasure?”

“You are a man,” the Queen declared. “Men make treasure. You will make it or you will all die! Madelyn's father, Tristan, was silent for a moment and then he replied, “I’ll need to find ore, make tools, and gather amber stone.” The Wild Queen growled, “You will not go anywhere, because men cannot be trusted.”

“My daughter can find the ore and amber stone,” he quickly announced. “Very well,” sighed the Wolf Queen. “Be quick about it: I want my treasure before sunset.” Madelyn’s father swiftly spoke again, “Making treasure will take at least three days. First, we must find the ore and amber stone. If you want your treasure, I’m sure my daughter Madelyn will return before the third day is through. Then I’ll gladly make your treasure before sunset in three days’ time.”

The Queen scowled at Madelyn then agreed, "Very well, by the sunset of the third day." "Guards, two of you!" She commanded. Two wolves stepped forward and she continued, "Should she fail, we will not lose one of our meals. Keep watch of her. Now go!"

Madelyn's father only had a moment to whisper one piece of advice to Madelyn before she was pulled away. "Take care to get away from the wolves, my dear, and run away as fast as you can," he whispered.

Just then the two wolves grasped the skirts of her dress in their teeth. Madelyn was dragged for ten feet or so and was then suddenly let go. She struggled and stood up on her feet. She had never been away from her family before and for a moment she was quite scared. How can I leave my mother, father, and little Piper with the wolves? And how could I stay when I might save them? she thought. Though she didn't quite know what it was she was looking for, she resolved to find the ore and amber stone, and return before the sunset of the third day. "They're all counting on me," she roused.

Anxious, Madelyn tiptoed through the trees and fields with the two wolves following her closely. She did not know where to go. For a short while, the three walked a distance. The day was lovely; and in spite of the wolves' menacing presence, Madelyn could not help but notice the beautiful shine of golden brown on the dry stalks of grass around her. For a brief moment, she even forgot all about the trouble her and her family were facing. It was then that she stumbled upon a rock. Catching herself from falling, she studied the rock and thought to herself, Ore and amber are found with rocks, like this one I've tripped on. If I can find rocks, I can find the ore and amber! Next, Madelyn called to the two wolves. "Where can I find lots of rocks?" The two wolves replied: "On the far end of a large hill East of here," they howled.

"Can you lead me there?" Madelyn asked. For a moment, the wolves spoke quietly to one another then they agreed: "Yes, but one of us must lead and the other will follow behind you. We wouldn't have you run off or get lost. The Queen would punish us severely," they said. Madelyn replied, "Take me! I'm sure to find the ore and amber the Queen desires there."

The distance was further than the wolves had realized. Madelyn was neither used to running long distances nor did she have four legs like the

wolves. The two wolves impatiently found themselves waiting for her time and time again. They passed through fields and waited, then through part of the woods where they again waited. Then they came to a perfect stream shining with waters as clear as glass. There the two wolves jumped the stream without a thought. Madelyn slowly followed by wading through the water. It was cold and the water reached up to her waist, but in a moment she was on the other side where the two impatient wolves awaited her. She squeezed the water from her clothes and continued onward as her clothes quickly dried.

Finally, in the evening they arrived at the wall of stones. What a wall of stones it was! Madelyn regarded the wall as likely a hundred feet high. Great heaps of stones that had broken off from the wall laid at its base. Madelyn immediately took to work, carefully inspecting the surface of the wall and the piles of stones. Unfortunately, for her search, their travel had taken most of the day, and it was nearly dusk. Night was soon upon them and Madelyn couldn't see very well in the dark, so the three of them decided to rest for the night.

Madelyn leaned in a crisscrossed position against the wall of stones, and the wolves laid on two flat stones several feet away in front of her. Even though she knew the two wolves feared the Queen, Madelyn was still worried that they would eat her in her sleep. She pretended to sleep; and after a while the two wolves themselves fell asleep. By that time, Madelyn was very tired indeed. Knowing she'd need all her strength to find the ore and amber stone, and seeing the wolves were fast asleep, she, too, fell into a deep slumber.

That night Madelyn dreamed that she saw the Wolf Queen gaze hungrily at her little brother, Piper. She looked on as if frozen, unable to do anything as the Queen advanced towards him, then Piper disappeared. A wicked smile spread upon the Queen's face. "Piper!" she screamed. As Madelyn woke, she saw the sun had just begun to rise. Her sudden shout had awoken the two wolves. They stared at her and she looked at them then back again. Madelyn thought to herself, It's only the second day. I still have a chance. I won't let that Terrible Queen eat Piper!

To fulfill her goal, Madelyn quickly got upon her feet and brushed herself off before seeking ore and amber among the cracks in the wall. She then began to thoroughly search the pile of stones at its base. She did not know

exactly what she was looking for, but she thought that it must look like a chunk of her mother's necklace.

And so, Madelyn searched for hours, turning over stone by stone. Some of the stones were very large and much too heavy for her to lift. She wondered if the ore and amber might be under one of them. But again, being unable to lift them, she instead continued to look under the smaller ones. The day was hot and having not yet eaten, Madelyn began to become hungry and tired.

Part of the way up the wall atop a ledge, a little set of eyes peered down on Madelyn. A curious chipmunk watched her as she overturned stone after stone. Seeing the two wolves keep a sharp watch over her, he figured she must be in some awful trouble. As she continued to work throughout the day, the clever chipmunk resolved to help. He gathered little berries that were good to eat and weaving in and out of rocks he piled them in a place where Madelyn was sure to find them. The chipmunk cautiously watched for hours, but Madelyn didn't find the berries.

Just when the chipmunk began to worry that she'd never get them, Madelyn who had been taking a break, got up and wandered towards the place where the berries were hidden. Madelyn soon found them and exclaimed, "Oh, what lovely little berries!" She quickly began to eat them; and before the two wolves could get close, she had devoured them all. Madelyn wondered where the berries had come from; but looking around, she could not see anyone. After a few minutes, she returned to her desperate search for the ore and amber.

The wolves were very suspicious. It didn't take them long to find the scent of the chipmunk at the spot where Madelyn had found the berries. The two followed the scent to the wall, all the while keeping an eye on Madelyn. But since there was no way up, they soon gave up, resolving to keep a watchful eye and catch the chipmunk if he came back. Madelyn wondered where the berries had come from; but knowing it was already nearing the end of the second day, she hurried to look in every place she could find for the ore and amber stone.

What if there wasn't any? Madelyn fretted. She couldn't let herself think that way. She muttered to herself, My family is counting on me! She then continued her search. "Where can I find the amber stone?" She prayed. But no ore or amber stone appeared. Gradually Madelyn began to feel more and more helpless. Finally, as dusk came, Madelyn sat down against the stone wall, where she had slumbered the night before. Now exhausted, she mumbled the words, "God, please help me find the ore and amber." Then she fell asleep.

The wolves stayed awake, still suspicious of the berries and scent of the chipmunk. Having not eaten anything all day, they hoped to dine on it. Knowing that Madelyn's last day began at dawn, they also didn't want anything great or small to risk the reward of flesh they'd receive from the Queen when Madelyn failed. For a while they each kept the other awake. But, as the hours began to pass, their eyes became heavier and heavier until at last they fell asleep.



The brave chipmunk, who had cautiously waited, slowly ventured out from his hiding spot. He carefully made his way down the stone wall with more berries for Madelyn. Sitting on her shoulder, the chipmunk whispered in her ear, "Girl, wake up." He had to repeat it several times until Madelyn's eyes opened. It was quite dark and she couldn't see anyone at first. Then after a minute, feeling the little weight upon her shoulder, she turned and saw the little chipmunk. With every polite word he could muster, he quietly whispered, "I'm sorry for waking ya, miss." Madelyn had never been this close to a talking chipmunk before. She paused and replied, "No harm done." The chipmunk softly continued, "Seeing the wolves, I thought ya might be in some kind of trouble. I figured you were hungry, so I left berries. Here are some more."

"Thank you," Madelyn replied a little loudly. She quickly scooped up the berries and ate them. Madelyn's voice had been a little too loud for the chipmunk's liking. In the dim light of the moon, he gazed over to see the wolves ears twitch. But they stayed fast asleep. Turning back to Madelyn, he urged, "Keep quiet, miss, and you have a chance to escape. There's an old town and in one of the houses lives an old man. The wolves are afraid to go there because it smells unsafe to them. It's the old man they smell, so perhaps he can help you?"

Checking first to see that the wolves were still asleep, Madelyn slowly rose. Quietly she tiptoed until both her and the chipmunk were far enough away that they did not worry the wolves would hear them. The chipmunk then introduced himself to Madelyn, "My name is Chase. What's your name, miss?" "Madelyn," she replied. "Nice to meet you, but now we must be quick since it'll take time to reach the old town, and the wolves will soon wake. I'll point the way," Chase directed.

On their way the chipmunk rode upon Madelyn's shoulder. Lit by the soft silver light of the moon, they crossed through woodlands and fields. Madelyn told Chase about her family and how they'd been found by the wolves. They soon crossed an old bridge and she recalled how she arrived at the wall of stones, and her terrible dream. The two talked as the hours passed and soon the sun began to rise. "Hurry, miss," the chipmunk cautioned, "The wolves will wake." Madelyn was very tired, but onward she continued. It was still a

good while before they arrived at the old town. Despite the time and their fear, they entered without seeing any wolves.

Chase directed Madelyn to the door of a home that seemed better kept than the others. She politely knocked on the door and waited. Feeling anxious that the two wolves could appear any minute, she knocked again. There was a shuffling inside, and a few moments later the door opened. Standing in the open doorway was an old man with kindly blue eyes and sagging cheeks. He appeared to have just woken up. He squinted at Madelyn in the late morning light. "It's not very often I have visitors," he remarked.

Then before Madelyn could say anything, he saw the chipmunk and exclaimed, "Chase!" The chipmunk leaped off of Madelyn's shoulder and caught upon the arm of the old man. Both clung to each other with excitement as long lost friends suddenly reunited at last.

"Where did you go?" the old man asked. "You left a week ago, and I thought I might never see you again." "I'm sorry, but I wanted to see my old home near the rocks," Chase replied. "I came back when I found this girl alone with two wolves." The old man grew silent and stared at Madelyn. "They're likely on their way here," Chase added. "I see," acknowledged the old man.

After pausing for a moment, he addressed Madelyn, "Madelyn my name is Caleb. Please come inside and tell me about yourself. You two have come far in one night and I'm sure we have more time before the wolves arrive. Everything will be alright."

Next, Chase motioned for her to come inside and Madelyn entered the cabin. Feeling very tired, she sat down on the only chair and would've fallen asleep, if she hadn't felt so hungry. Across the room a small fire heated a large black pot that bubbled with warm oats and something sweet. The smell of warm brown sugar filled Madelyn's nose as the old man poured a bowl. He sprinkled a strange red powder on top and offered, "Here, this will give you the strength you need; we have time, but not enough for you to sleep." While Madelyn ate, the old man told her how he and Chase had come to meet. Chase

then explained where he'd been. Just as he finished, Madelyn completed her meal licking the last of its sweetness from her fingers.

As if by some magic, Madelyn not only felt full, but she no longer felt tired. "Now that you feel better," Caleb said to Madelyn, "Tell me why those wolves were following you?" Madelyn replied, "They were sent by the Wolf Queen." Then she began when her family set up camp and explained how the wolves captured them. She told how she was sent to go look for treasure and the long walk to the stone wall. She further admitted how worried, tired, and hungry she'd become, and how she found the berries and met Chase. Then at last how they came to the cabin. "I still haven't found any treasure to give to the Queen," Madelyn added. "What will I do?"

Following her tale, Caleb was silent for a moment then spoke: "The Evil Queen won't give you and your family up easily. Even if you could find ore and amber stone to make the treasure, she's still likely to eat one of you." He paused again and said, "You need a different kind of treasure." Madelyn imagined some grand treasure that would convince the horrid Queen to let her family go. Caleb then told Madelyn about the kindly Lion and its love of lambs and shepherds. Then he elaborated about its death, the great treasure it left, and the Keeper.

"I am the Keeper of the Lions Paws," he declared. "I'm old, so I must pass the gift on to another. The town is empty, the people are gone, and only I remain. You must take my gift, the gift of the Lion's Paws." Caleb then reached for his bag, opened it, and pulled out the precious pair of Winged Lion's Paws and handed them to Madelyn. He urged, "Please take these, put them on, use their power to save your family and drive every terrible wolf beyond the borders of the woodlands and hills."

Madelyn carefully took the pair of winged paws into her hands and felt the soft fur. She looked at the bright glow that seemed to radiate from the golden wings on each side. Madelyn felt that they were truly something special indeed. It was just then that the sound of a thud followed by clawing at the door came. Caleb exclaimed to Madelyn, "Put them on, the wolves are here! The time for the power of the paws to again be seen has come!"

In turn, Madelyn quickly obeyed. As she put one foot into the first paw a pleasant sensation began to creep over her. Then as she put her foot into the second paw she felt a powerful urge to run and roar. Chase the chipmunk, who had been quiet, quickly climbed upon Caleb's shoulder as Caleb opened the front door. The two wolves swiftly leapt into the house. Inside they saw a Lion, so immediately they whimpered and bolted outside from where they'd come. Madelyn shouted and Caleb and Chase covered their ears for the loudness of her lion roar. Madelyn then took off in a sprint, chasing the two wolves. Madelyn found that her strength and speed were greater than she'd ever felt, even more so than any person or beast alive. She soon caught the two wolves and leapt upon them. In her deep roar, she told them to run beyond the borders of the woodlands and hills and to never come back. And with that, the two wolves fled, sprinting with all speed until they were out of sight.

It was just after midday and Madelyn knew that in a few hours the sun would set. She turned and began to run, all the while the words of the evil Wolf Queen echoed in her head: "By the sunset of the third day." But she wasn't without help. Madelyn felt as if an invisible hand pointed the way she should run, and she steadfastly followed it. She remembered her dream with the Queen and Piper, and again recalled the direction of the queen: "By the sunset of the third day." Madelyn could run very quickly and yet it seemed time was against her. She bounded as fast as she could for hours and just as the sun began to hang low in the sky she came to the place where the Wolf Queen held her family.

As Madelyn entered the camp, the wolves heard her approach, turned, looked up, and saw a great Lion before them. Madelyn, not in the least feeling tired (for the power of the paws would not allow her to feel tired), roared with more force than the strongest wind you ever did feel. The dust, leaves, and grasses on the ground were whisked away, and several of the wolves were nearly thrown by the force of her roar. The Queen and her wolves could only think of one thing: escape!



They'd never seen a creature of such power and majesty. Some wolves had feared the stories of the Lion told by the woodland creatures, and others had not believed. Yet there it stood before them. Madelyn roared "You'll all leave the woodlands and hills now, or pay the price! This is your only warning!"

She walked calmly to the side of her family, who by some magic, could see that the Lion was their dear Madelyn. Putting a paw over her ear, Madelyn signaled to her family to plug their ears as best they could. With the largest breath Madelyn could muster, she released the biggest roar ever heard by wolf or man. Clods of dirt and stones were lifted up like leaves in the breeze and hurled by the power of the roar in the direction of the Wolf Queen. It was then that every wolf, including the Queen, scrambled to run, run, run in any direction they could. It was only important they run away from the terrible Lion that would surely be their end, if they stayed. Without hesitation, Madelyn began to chase them. The wolves ran, and they ran, and they ran. But the Lion always seemed to be behind them. Madelyn chased the scattered wolves beyond the borders of the woodlands and hills until late into the night.

That night her family made a fire and waited for Madelyn, hoping for her safe return. As the red flames of the fire crawled upwards to the sky, she appeared. Madelyn's family was overjoyed. Madelyn had returned and not only that, but she'd saved them all. Madelyn told them her story all about her search for ore and amber stone. She recalled how she met the kind chipmunk named Chase and how he brought her to the home of the old man Caleb in the town. She described the gift of the Lions Paws and the swift strength she felt as she chased the wolves from the woodlands and hills. She showed her family the gift of the Paws and after each had felt the soft fur and touched the golden wings they all embraced again for joy.

Madelyn and her family slept very well that night. In the morning, they began to travel to the old town and late in the day Madelyn showed them the home of Caleb. Caleb and Chase were there, and the six of them had the most wonderful meeting. Over the coming weeks, the family moved into one of the old homes in the town next to Caleb and began to repair it. Caleb was especially happy to have found their company, and Chase made a home in a nearby tree.

In summary, you might ask, what happened to the Lion's Paws? In their new home Madelyn and her family placed the Winged Lion's Paws in a special place upon the mantle. With gratitude, they decorated them with ribbons and hung ornaments from the mantle, making them lovelier than they had ever appeared. From then on, each of them, including little Piper, always remembered and revered the gift of the Lion and the memory of that special day when it had saved them.

The End



The Mouse Bride



There's a story told only by mice in the old kingdom, of a beautiful couple who were engaged to be married. The groom named Peter was a young handsome man with dirty blonde hair and eyes the color of the perfect blue sky on a clear day. His beautiful bride Katrina had long chocolate brown hair and lovely eyes the green of a fresh bed of spring grass. He'd grown up the son of a very wealthy businessman who in recent years had lost his fortune. Due to the family's financial downturn His aging father would daily say that he wished for his son to move to a more prosperous kingdom and start a life where he might find success. Peter indeed wished to do so, but he was afraid that he could not provide a lifestyle for Katrina like what she was used to. Although he had managed to purchase a small cottage, He felt that it wasn't nearly fine enough. He told only his close friend a tailor, who wished he could do something to help his friend. But he was no man of great means; he was just a simple tailor with a wife and children to care for.

Katrina was the youngest daughter of a duchess; and being the youngest, she often felt ignored by her wealthy widowed mother who seemed to spend all of her time controlling the lives of Katrina's elder sisters. Before Peter, her only confidant had been her maid. For years her mother seemed to be more concerned with parties and getting her elder sisters married than on raising her. Now that her sisters were married, it was strange that her mother's attention was now focused on her instead. Her mother was so focused on her, in fact that all through their courtship Peter and Katrina felt as though she didn't give them a single inch of space to breathe. Her mother would often talk of how wonderful the evening party and ceremony to commemorate their wedding would be. She spoke about it so often the two wondered if she was more interested in the occasion to celebrate than in their actual relationship with one another? The two would often sneak out without Katrina's mother knowing. "I do wish I didn't have to return tonight," Katrina would say. And yet in spite of wishing the hour always came when she had to return. As they

parted for the night Katrina would often say to Peter, “You’re so kind. I can't imagine living my life without you.” Then Peter would reply “And I can't imagine living without you, your smile makes my day sing,” he’d reply. Then they’d kiss and go their separate ways for the night.

Their engagement was private and romantic and their wedding was scheduled for June the fourth. Katrina's mother said, “No time of year could be more perfect,” and indeed she was right. Katrina's mother insisted, however, that she handle the wedding and just about everything. Though it bothered Katrina, the couple resolved to let her handle things without disagreement. Not long after, Katrina’s mother began to insist that the couple move in after the wedding. The two politely rejected the offer and among all the other details it was the only thing they disagreed with her about. “Surely when this is all over, she'll leave us alone,” Katrina expressed to Peter. Over the weeks leading up to the wedding her mother began to seem more interested in the dinner party the night before than the actual ceremony. Things went smoothly, however, and their families seemed to get along as if they’d known each other for a generation.

On the night of the dinner party, the weather was lovely with a mild temperature that was neither too cold nor too hot. The couple looked lovely and every guest that had been invited had arrived. It seemed as if everything was to be perfect.

At the party there were hundreds of delightful dishes, snacks, and goodies from different parts of the kingdom and indeed the world. It was, of course, all planned by Katrina's mother who was pleased to show off her wealth to her guests. Katrina was not concerned about most of it. Yet, she was extremely delighted by the presence of numerous rare cheeses that adorned one of the tables. Now as it happened the merchant who had brought the cheeses had some that unbeknownst to him had been stolen from the dinner table of a goblin. How exactly they’d been taken, no one knew. But the goblin had followed the scent of his cheese to the merchant’s establishment and then to the party where he hid under a table.

Taking a reprieve from greeting guests with Peter, Katrina found the cheeses and couldn’t help but try each one until at last she tasted the goblin's

stolen cheese. It tasted unlike any cheese Katrina had eaten before. It was aged, but strangely sweet. Katrina ate more and more of it until finally she returned to Peter's side to continue greeting guests. "I've just eaten the most curious cheese," she mentioned. Peter thought nothing of it. However, unbeknownst to both of them the goblin had been watching and he was very angry indeed. The goblin didn't know who had stolen his cheese and he didn't care. He only felt that someone must suffer for his being robbed. When he saw the bride Katrina eat some of his cheese, he felt that there was no one better to punish than her. For, the party in part seemed to focus on her and he could think of no one else. And so it was right then and there under a table that he cursed her and disappeared.

What happened to the goblin after that no one knows. In fact, we might never have known there was a goblin in the first place if it wasn't for a little church cricket that had traveled in the robes of a guest to the party. He sat munching under the table on crumbs that had fallen to the floor then the goblin appeared. Though the cricket thought it strange that a goblin would come to a dinner party neither paid the other any mind. As the goblin grew angry, the cricket became worried. But the goblin still payed him no heed. A few minutes later, the goblin grew into a rage and just when the cricket thought he might explode the goblin spoke, "My cheese! my cheese! By my will I shall turn her into a mouse." As the words left his mouth, it was then that he mysteriously disappeared.

Katrina and Peter continued to greet and visit with guests and as the hour began to grow late, with-it Katrina began to feel tired and terribly sick. She excused herself and went to her room. Peter continued to greet guests including his good friend the Tailor, but one by one as the guests began to leave he began to worry about Katrina. He excused himself and fetched the maid to check on her. A few minutes later, she returned saying that Katrina's gown was on the bed, but that she was nowhere to be found. Alarmed, Peter went to her room to find everything exactly as the maid had said. By that time the maid had told Katrina's mother, who because there were still guests didn't raise much of a ruckus. She only quietly said that she wondered what it must be that Peter did to make her run off.

Looking for any sign of his bride, Peter left the house. He rushed to the carriage house, but the carriage was still there. He ran to the stable, but there were no missing horses. He searched in the quarters apart from the house where he was to stay the night, but it was undisturbed. Finally, he walked around the house then down the lane until he gave up and returned inside. Ignoring the maids, servants, Katrina's mother, and the few remaining guests Peter returned to Katrina's room. He checked the closet and Katrina's open diary on the nightstand only to find himself exactly where he started, without a clue to where Katrina had gone.

He sat on the bed. "Where have you gone to my love?" he said to himself. Alone he sat there for quite some time until the last few guests had left. Peter didn't know what to think. Did Katrina still love him? Did she not wish to marry him? What was she afraid of? All these and many more thoughts went through his mind as he sat there wondering, until a little tug came on the side of his trousers near his right foot. At first he ignored the tug, but then it came again and again. Glancing down to the floor he saw a mouse. It stood by his shoe erect and unafraid of him. Peter thought this was very strange indeed. When the mouse tugged at his trousers again, it seemed to Peter as though the mouse wanted his attention. Peter said to himself, "My bride is missing and now I'm gone mad." He spoke to the mouse "Hello, little mouse," he said. The mouse seemed as if it was trying to signal something to him. "I'm sorry, but I don't understand what you're trying to say," he added, following, "Now I must be mad since I'm trying to talk to a mouse!"



In turn, the mouse paused for a moment and looked around the room. A moment later, it scurried across the floor to the fireplace and got a small piece of charcoal in its teeth. Returning to the base of the bed and scurrying up the overhanging bed sheets, it made its way to the nightstand. It was then that the curious little creature appeared to write something in Katrina's diary. Peter got up and walked over to the diary. In light, awkward, charcoal scratches the mouse had left a message "I AM KATRINA." For a moment Peter thought that he was truly mad, but then he said to the little mouse "Katrina, is that you?" The mouse became very excited and nodded its head. Peter could hardly believe it. He began to ask her questions. It was hard for her to answer. Her squeaks meant little to Peter and it was awkward writing with her little paws and teeth. So Peter paused and asked only one question "What happened? How did you become a mouse?" She responded, "I don't know. I felt sick, then fell asleep. When I woke, I was a mouse."

Peter sat there thinking and Katrina slowly wrote out another message, "Don't tell anyone," it read. Peter knew that Katrina's mother had an irrational fear of mice and didn't know what she'd do if she saw one. Katrina followed with another message, "I'm afraid." Peter picked Katrina up and carefully held her close to his face where she nuzzled his cheek. "We can worry about this in the morning," he said. He cried, "I'm glad I've found you!" With that he carefully placed her in his suit pocket and left the house to his quarters near the carriage house. Once inside, he fashioned a bed for her in an empty washing bowl with two handkerchiefs. As Peter turned around, he saw Katrina sitting on the floor with a piece of paper. Peter looked and the message read, "I love you." Peter was moved to tears. Then after a moment, he replied, "I love you, too." The two shared a simple embrace and both retired for the night.

Peter and Katrina awoke early before the sun rose. They both agreed that they needed to find someone who could help. But, Katrina still didn't want anyone to know. Finally, the two agreed to leave town and find a doctor. They both remembered that just before she became a mouse she had begun to feel sick. As the sun was rising, they left and went to the stable. Peter quickly saddled and mounted a horse. Then for three hours they rode at a brisk pace until they arrived at the home of a doctor in a small town. The doctor was working in his garden, but he was quickly summoned by his wife who told him that there was a gentleman inside who needed his help. The doctor came in and greeted Peter. Peter wasted no time in beginning his story. He told about how his bride Katrina had begun to feel sick at the party the night before and left for her room. Then he revealed how the maid went to check on her and couldn't find her. He recalled how he searched for her and then found that she was a mouse. Peter presented the doctor one of the charcoal notes from the night before. The look on the doctor's face was incredulous. For a moment he said nothing then asked, "Where's your bride now?" "She's here with me," Peter said then, carefully lifted Katrina from his pocket to show the doctor. In spite of his feeling that the doctor wasn't going to help them, he asked, "Is there anything you can do?" The doctor replied, "I'm afraid there's not a thing I can do to help her. But if you wish, I could find someone at the asylum who may know more about this than I do." "That won't be necessary," Peter added. "I thank you, Sir. But I must go." With that Peter and Katrina left

and quickly rode away. Over the next three weeks, Peter and Katrina left early every morning searching for doctors and professors or anyone they thought could help them. Most thought Peter was mad, and the rest said there was nothing they could do. During this time Katrina's family didn't bother them. They presumed that Peter would give up when he didn't find her and return to his quaint little cottage.

Finally, one-night Katrina wrote out this message in charcoal. "We need a miracle. Perhaps we should ask a Priest?" Peter replied, "Yes, my love. We'll go tomorrow." The following morning they set out. Their journey wasn't very far. They rode to the Church where they would have been married arriving just after sunrise. The priest, having been the minister who would have married the couple, was glad to see Peter and asked him to take a seat in the chapel while he finished preparing himself.

A short while later, the priest entered and sat down with Peter. "What can I do to help you, son?" the priest asked. "Father, something has happened to Katrina. Most everyone thinks that she has run out on me. But she's with me right now." With that he explained everything. Starting at the dinner party and finishing with how he and Katrina had visited doctors and professors of every kind that they could find and none could help them. It was then that Peter carefully lifted Katrina from his pocket and set her in the seat of the pew between himself and the priest. The priest looked at Peter and for a moment Peter felt that he, too, would think he was crazy. Just then the chirp of a cricket broke the silence. The priest cocked his head up a little as if he was listening to the sound. A few seconds later, a dark colored cricket hopped up on the priest's habit and continued his chirping. "Is that right?" the Priest said, seeming to respond to the cricket's chirps.

The cricket continued and the priest listened intently. After a minute, the cricket went quiet and the priest sat there thinking. He then explained to Peter and Katrina, "My cricket went with me to the dinner party a few weeks ago. He was under a table eating when he saw a goblin. He says the goblin was very angry and looked as if he might explode when he exclaimed, 'My cheese! My cheese! By my will I shall turn her into a mouse!' Then he disappeared." The cricket chirped once more and the priest replied, "Thank you." With that the priest stroked the little cricket's back who then hopped off under the pews. It was clear to Peter, Katrina, and the priest what had

happened. After a few seconds of silence the priest said, "I need to pray. Wait for me." Then he got up and went to his quarters.

A half an hour later, the priest came back. He revealed, "There's an old wiseman a half a day from here at the top of a hill near a lake. He's the only man who might truly have a solution for your plight. It's late in the day, so I'd advise you to leave in the morning. But I feel compelled to tell you to ask yourselves 'Can this curse be a blessing in disguise?'" Peter and Katrina were confused by the priest's answer. How could this curse be a blessing? Yet, they left glad that they both knew what had happened and that they had a place they might go for help. The hope that they might not live in the strange separation of man and mouse like this for the rest of their lives grew brighter.

Peter had learned to ask simple questions to Katrina that she could respond to in yes or no answers and that allowed them to communicate without the need to always have charcoal and paper. On their way back to Peter's temporary quarters, however, the two were so excited that they could do little to communicate. Not that it mattered for they both felt the same feeling of excitement and hope. When at last they'd arrived, Katrina wasted no time in spelling out another message on paper. "I love you, Peter," it said. "I love you, too." He warmly stated back. The two shared their gentle albeit awkward embrace and retired to bed. Lying there in the dark both remembered the words of the priest and asked themselves "How could this curse be a blessing?" Soon both of them had drifted off to sleep.

In the morning the maid came in and told Peter that Katrina's mother had ordered him out by the end of the week. When she attempted to get the wash bowl, Peter stopped her and insisted that he would take care of it himself. He laid back down and Katrina who was awake climbed down from her washing bowl bed and spelled out another message. It read, "At least my mother has left us alone during all this." Peter too was glad that in spite of their situation that at least they had space from Katrina's mother. Before the wedding only it and the worry of providing an adequate place for Katrina were what bothered him. They were soon prepared for their journey to the wiseman's home; and so picking up Katrina in his hand and placing her in his coat pocket, they again departed on horseback.

Everyone in the kingdom knew about the wise old man many called the wizard. He was very smart and the only person left far and wide who understood anything about magic. Peter and Katrina resolved to visit him that day. After washing and taking a bite to eat they set out for his home. Making swift time of their travel on horseback they arrived in an hour's time. In spite of the urgency they felt, Peter and Katrina took a moment to look at the beautiful scenery. The lake was a beautiful deep blue and could be seen in the distance feeding through a river into the mouth of the ocean. Carefully dismounting, Peter tied up the horse and knocked on the door. "Hello?" Replied a voice from around the house. "Come round," it instructed. Peter and Katrina came around the house to see a man with a brown wizard hat tending to his goats. Peter introduced himself "Hello, I'm Peter, and this is Katrina." "A mouse, eh? What are ya wanting?" The man replied. Peter could see the man wasn't about wasting time with words so he quickly replied "Katrina my bride was turned into a mouse by a goblin's curse. The priest told us you might be able to do something to help. Is there a way to change her back?" The wizard replied, "There's no undoing a goblin's curse. I can change someone into a creature, but I can't undo someone else's magic, especially not a goblin's curse." Peter and Katrina were visibly disappointed. Why had the priest told them to come all this way? "I'm sorry" the wizard said. "Even magic can have its limits." "But isn't there something you can do?" Peter asked. "I'm sorry, but I can't change her back," he reiterated. Peter and Katrina thanked the man, lingered briefly, and then returned home. It was a slow ride back and the two arrived late in the evening.

That night both Peter and Katrina could think of nothing but the words of the wizard: "I can't change her back." The disappointment knowing that Katrina was likely stuck forever as a mouse made it hard to sleep. What would it mean for their relationship? What strange separation would the two lovers find in their future? And why had the priest told them to travel and speak with the wizard? Finally, the two fell fast asleep. Near dawn Peter had a dream. In his sleep he could see the face of the priest and hear his words again and again "Can this curse be a blessing in disguise?" He awoke and spoke to Katrina. "Darling, I know what we must do." Without washing himself, he picked her up and walked out the door to the stables saying, "We're going to my friend, the Tailor." What could the Tailor possibly do? Katrina thought. Peter saddled a horse and climbed atop it to ride to his friend's home. The Tailor didn't live very far away and so a few minutes later they arrived at his

cottage in the town. Inside the two spoke privately and the only words Katrina could hear were when Peter asked his friend, "Can you return the horse?" His friend nodded and a few moments later the Tailor saddled a second horse and began to follow them. On the way Peter explained to Katrina "I'm going to ask the wizard to turn me into a mouse. Our wedding is tomorrow and we'll live in luxury away from your mother."

An hour later, they arrived at the home of the wizard. As Peter got down from the horse, Katrina who had kept herself composed for the ride began to cry joyful, little mouse tears. Peter and the Tailor spoke with the wizard and a moment later they entered his lab. The wizard gave Peter one last chance to change his mind saying, "Are ya sure you want to do this? It's very difficult to undo." Peter confirmed and the wizard gave him something to drink, opened a book and spoke a few words. Peter began to feel strange and before he knew it he was caught in a pile of his own clothes. His friend the Tailor reached his hand in and picked him up. Peter was now a mouse. Katrina and Peter were overjoyed. The Tailor and Wizard listened to their little squeaks and watched as they kissed and embraced. The Tailor placed a piece of paper on the floor and the Wizard handed Peter a small piece of charcoal which he handed to Katrina since he was sure that as a mouse she was the better writer. He squeaked a few words and she wrote a simple message "Thank you, we're ready!"

That night the Tailor returned the horse to the stable and Peter and Katrina spent the night with the Tailor's family having a small wedding party for the couple before all went to bed. The following morning the tailor fetched Peter's father and Katrina's friend the maid for their private wedding at the church. The priest was glad for their return and smiled more than anyone present had ever before seen. The wedding started late due to the time it took to explain the situation to Peter's father and Katrina's friend the maid. In spite of their shock, the wedding proceeded, and they fulfilled their duties as witnesses with the Tailor acting as the best man. The couple took their vows then sealed it with a kiss. When the ceremony was completed, everyone at the small wedding chose to keep the event a secret.



Katrina's mother never found out what happened. At the end of the week, Peter's temporary quarters were cleaned out. A variety of rumors circulated about the couple. Some said that they had left for the lands to the south. Others said they'd left for the jungles of the East. Others said that Katrina had run away and Peter had gone mad and left to live alone far away. There were many rumors, but none were true. Peter's father sold Peter's small cottage and the money was used to support the couple. Instead of that cottage, they went to live in a lovely hole in the wall in the warm home of the Tailor and his family. You might think that a hole in the wall wouldn't be a very nice place to live. Yet, their carpet was a square of satin and their bed was hand crafted to be as soft as the feathers of a dove chick. The two lived quite luxuriously, but they were always grateful for the help they'd received from the Wizard, the priest, and the Tailor and his family. Every Christmas the couple spent the day with the Tailor's family, Peter's father, and Katrina's friend the maid.

There they had a grand feast and would recall the depths of their gratitude for each other and for those who had helped them. Their tale spread throughout the kingdom from mouse to mouse until one day a little door mouse with whom I'm acquainted told me the story. The two continued to live happily together and had many more adventures than what you'd expect from two small mice. They even saved the king. But that's a story for another time.

The End

